

Washington, DC- Tuesday, Congressman Harry Teague urged the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop a plan to deliver Post-9/11 GI Bill emergency education benefits due to southern New Mexico's veterans. Currently, all eligible New Mexico veterans would have to travel to Albuquerque to collect the education benefits. The letter comes one day after Congressman Teague held a roundtable discussion with veteran's currently enrolled in the program at New Mexico State University.

"Many of the veterans enrolled in this program have taken out loans or paid out of pocket to make up for the VA's late checks - it would be an insult to ask a veteran to finance a trip hours away to get the benefits that they were promised and that they are entitled to," said Congressman Harry Teague who is a member of the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs. "It is our job to ensure that these veterans and their eligible relatives have access to these benefits - in this case that means working with the VA to come up with a plan to deliver the checks within a reasonable distance from where our veterans are enrolled in school."

In the letter, Congressman Teague applauded Secretary Shinseki's quick response in making emergency checks available to veterans waiting to receive their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, but he expressed concern that benefit checks would only be available at VA regional benefit offices, with the closest office located in Albuquerque. The benefits will be available starting this Friday, October 2nd, of up to \$3,000 to students who have applied for educational benefits and who have not received their payments.

Nationwide, more than 277,000 veterans and their eligible relatives applied for assistance but the VA has fallen far behind in processing payments.

Full text of the letter is below:

September 28, 2009

The Honorable Patrick Dunne

Under Secretary for Benefits

Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Ave NW

Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Dunne,

Thank you and Secretary Shinseki for your swift action last week announcing that emergency checks would be made available to veterans waiting to receive their benefits under the new Post-9/11 GI Bill. Such sweeping and decisive action to solve problems for veterans is exactly what the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has needed for some time. I am pleased that we now seem to have leaders willing to utilize their offices to serve veterans like they have served us.

With this decision, however, I am concerned that the VA plans to distribute emergency benefit

checks from the regional offices of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). My Congressional district, which is exceptionally large (bigger than Pennsylvania) and largely rural, does not contain a regional benefits office. In fact, many communities that I represent are several hours driving from the New Mexico benefits office in Albuquerque.

In Secretary Shinseki's announcement last week, he encouraged VA personnel to "get out their roadmaps" so that they could deliver the checks to recipients living and studying far away from regional offices. To ensure that this happens, I would like you and your staff to provide me, as soon as possible, with a plan for the VBA to deliver checks to recipients throughout my southern New Mexico district. If my staff and I can assist in any way please contact me at (202) 225-2365.

I look forward to your response and working with you on this very important matter. Again, thank you for your swift action on behalf of our veterans. Congress acted to provide deserved educational and economic benefits for those who served their country after the attacks of September 11. It is critical that we work together to follow through on this commitment.

Sincerely,

Harry Teague

Member of Congress